

Mystery of the Poison Guest at Wealthy Mrs. Case's Party

Who Is the New "Typhoid Mary" Who Haunted This Fashionable Society Function Like an Angel of Death, Scattering the Disease Germs That Made Thirty-Nine Women Seriously Ill and Have Already Killed Two Victims?



American Soldiers Being Inoculated with Anti-Typhoid Vaccine. It is This Vaccine on Which Cleveland Society Is Now Relying for Protection Against the Still Unknown "Poison Guest" Who Was Responsible for the Present Epidemic.

"Some one among those whom Mrs. Case welcomed so cordially was the 'poison guest'—a carrier of deadly disease germs whose presence was a menace to the lives of her hostess and the other women. It was as if she had displayed beneath her stylish hat the sinister features of a death's head, its bony lips grinning horribly over the havoc she was to cause. But there was no means of knowing that the 'poison guest' was a living menace—she looked and probably felt in the best of health."

WHO was the "poison guest" who spread disease and death at the luncheon party given by Mrs. George S. Case, the wealthy and fashionable Cleveland, Ohio, society leader? Who was it that scattered broadcast at this smart function the germs which quickly made thirty-nine of those present seriously ill and has already sent two of the women to an untimely grave? Who was it among all those whom Mrs. Case welcomed so cordially who might well have shown beneath her stylish hat the sinister features of a death's head, grinning horribly at the havoc she was about to cause?

These are questions which Cleveland's most exclusive society and the city's medical profession as well are anxious to have answered. Until they are answered—until the "poison guest" is identified and placed where she can do no further harm—people in the smart set will be taking their lives in their hands every time they accept invitations to dance, dinner, luncheon or reception. For it is the mysterious "poison guest" is among those present the function is likely to be followed by results as disastrous as those which overtook Mrs. Case and her guests.

It is virtually certain that the "poison guest" who wrought such havoc at the recent luncheon is a disease carrier fully as dangerous as the famous "Typhoid Mary." Very probably she looks and feels in the best of health. Undoubtedly she is wholly unconscious of the fact that she is a living menace to everybody with whom she comes in contact—that a touch of her hand may prove fatal and that her presence at a dance or dinner party may be the means of infecting everyone else in the room with paratyphoid or the still more serious form of typhoid fever.

These are the reasons why the running down of the "poison guest" is such a difficult matter and why Cleveland society cannot breathe easy while she is at large—accepting invitations to all sorts of smart affairs and doubtless entertaining extensively in her own home.

The never-to-be forgotten luncheon that has resulted in a serious epidemic of paratyphoid, was one of the social events of the Summer in Cleveland. The party was given by Mrs. George S. Case, in honor of the newest member of the wealthy Case family—Mrs. Albert Case, the bride of George S. Case's brother. Fifty women accepted the invitations and the gay, expensively gowned throng that filled the palatial Case home on the afternoon of June 25 included representatives of the city's most distinguished families.

Everybody was delighted with the charming entertainment Mrs. Case provided in honor of her new sister-in-law.

The floral decorations were elaborate; a famous orchestra played behind a screen of palms; the appetizing luncheon was served most attractively by a celebrated caterer, the menu including chicken salad, New York steak, cream cheese sandwiches and coffee. It was a most pleasant affair, this party, at which, as it later developed, the angel of death was stalking about in the guise of a "poison guest."

While everybody was still talking about the remarkable success of Mrs. Case's luncheon the telephones in the homes of Cleveland society began to buzz with evil tidings. All of a sudden there was a great deal of illness—more than there had been in these circles even during the great influenza epidemic.

"Have you heard that Mrs. George Case is quite ill?" one society matron would telephone to another.

"No, my dear, but they tell me that Emily Glidden and Mrs. B. F. Richardson are in bed with trained nurses in attendance on them night and day. Really, they say poor Mrs. Richardson's condition is quite serious—that she may not live."

"I'm shocked to hear it. Why, I saw them both at Mrs. Case's luncheon, and they seemed in the best of health."

And so it went. Within forty-eight hours, Mrs. Case, the hostess, and thirty-seven of the guests who had enjoyed her hospitality on the afternoon of June 25 were stricken. All were under medical care either at home or in a hospital, and the condition of several was such as to cause grave alarm.

The list of patients was a notable one. Feeding like a page from the Social Register of the Ohio metropolis. Included in it was one of the most charming debutantes of recent seasons—Miss Catherine Hall, who for several weeks was at death's door, and who is not yet fully recovered. Other notable names among those stricken were Miss Emily Glidden, daughter of the millionaire varnish manufacturer; Mrs. Walter S. Adams, Mrs. I. L. Jennings, Mrs. John Woods, Mrs. L. L. Jennings, Mrs. C. C. Wise, Mrs. O. H. Mix, Mrs. F. M. Ray and Miss Judith Tannev.

At first there was considerable doubt as to the exact nature of the disease from which all these victims were suffering. Some of the symptoms indicated ptomaine poisoning, others the form of typhoid fever known as paratyphoid. Laboratory tests, while not wholly conclusive, threw the weight of evidence in favor of the latter.

Paratyphoid is a disease presenting all the symptoms and morbid signs of a mild case of typhoid fever. It has been found associated with bacilli closely resembling though differing in some important respects from the bacillus typhosus found in genuine typhoid.

Before this diagnosis was established the various physicians had, by comparing notes, established the surprising fact that each and every one of the women whom this mysterious disease had laid low was at Mrs. Case's house on the afternoon of June 25.

This could hardly be a more coincidence. Quite plainly the epidemic must have had its origin in some unhealthful influences to which these women were subjected while they were gathered for luncheon at the luxurious Case home on Lakeside avenue. But what could these unhealthful influences have been? What source of infection could possibly be lurking in a house where no expense has been spared to insure physical well-being? What could have been the nature of the menace that was evidently hovering over Mrs. Case and her guests while they were enjoying this charming social affair? These were things which physicians and health authorities undertook to find out.

At first there was an inclination to cast suspicion on the food served at the luncheon, but no ground could be found for any such explanation of the epidemic. The caterer is a man above reproach who uses only the best materials, and serves them in the most hygienic fashion. He had served similar menus at two or three other homes the same day, and in these cases there had been no ill effects. Laboratory tests showed that none of the chefs or waiters was a carrier of paratyphoid bacilli.

The medical experts who were studying the problem were at last forced to the conclusion that Cleveland society numbers among its members a disease carrier like "Typhoid Mary"—a woman who harbors in her system so many of the typhoid or

paratyphoid bacilli, or both, that she is constantly spreading infection among those about her.

Such a woman, it is believed, was the "poison guest" at Mrs. Case's party. It was she who spread the germs that attacked Mrs. Case and thirty-seven of her guests and made them dangerously ill.

The direct cause of typhoid and paratyphoid is certain bacilli which medical science easily recognizes. These bacilli are spread through the bodily discharges of sufferers from the disease as well as through persons like "Typhoid Mary," who are in the best of health.

"Typhoid Mary" poisoned those around her with typhoid germs by handling the food which they ate. The "poison guest" at Mrs. Case's party accomplished the same dread result by shaking the hands or kissing the cheeks of her hostess and her fellow guests.

Thus far there have been two fatalities as a result of the "poison guest's" acceptance of the luncheon invitation—Mrs. Clara Richardson, wife of a prominent business man, and Bonnie Roberts, one of the other victims have been at death's door and the recovery of several is still doubtful.

One thing which strengthens the belief in the presence of a "Typhoid Mary" in Cleveland's most exclusive circles is the fact that the time intervening between the ill-fated luncheon party and the start of the epidemic is exactly that usually required

for paratyphoid bacilli to develop their harmful possibilities.

All the leading physicians and bacteriologists of Cleveland have been hard at work ever since the epidemic started, trying to explain the mystery of its cause. Among the city health officials who have been actively engaged on the problem are Dr. H. L. Rockwood, health commissioner of Cleveland; Dr. G. B. Morehouse, chief of the city bureau of communicable diseases; Dr. O. H. Way, head of the bacteriological department; Dr. R. C. Roueche, chief inspector of food and dairies, and Dr. W. J. Benner, health commissioner of Lockwood, the fashionable suburb where a number of the victims reside.

"The fact that no illness followed other luncheons served on the same day by the caterer employed by Mrs. Case," says Health Commissioner Rockwood, "is good

Miss Catherine Hall, Who Lay for Weeks at the Point of Death After Being Infected with the Germs of Paratyphoid by Mrs. Case's "Poison Guest."



Mrs. George S. Case, the Fashionable Society Leader, Whose Party Had Such a Ghastly Aftermath and Who Was Herself Made Dangerously Ill.

proof, I think, that the cause of the trouble does not lie in the food of which the hostess and her guests partook. It seems quite possible that one of the women present was, without herself knowing it, a carrier of the germs which cause the disease.

"As in typhoid fever, paratyphoid must come from another case of the disease. The germs are often transmitted by a person known as a typhoid carrier, of whom New York's 'Typhoid Mary' is a well-known example. Such a person must be isolated in order to protect the public, and that is why we are so anxious to find out just who it was who spread the germs that did such harm to Mrs. Case and her guests on the afternoon of June 25."

Everybody remembers the case of the original "Typhoid Mary," whose counterpart is now found in Cleveland. She is the most dangerous germ carrier ever recorded by medical history. Although not ill herself, she carries with her always the means of infecting others.

Her real name is Mary Mallon. When back in 1906 it was discovered what a menace she is to the public health she fled from the New York health authorities, but was finally captured and held a prisoner for three years in the quarantine hospital on North Brother Island in New York harbor.

When finally released it was on her promise not to resume her old occupation of cook, where, of course, the risk of the spread of infection by such a disease carrier is greatest. Five years later a serious outbreak of typhoid fever occurred at the Sloane Hospital for Women in New York. In the effort to learn the cause of this epidemic it was discovered that Mary Mallon had broken her parole and under an assumed name had taken employment in the hospital kitchen.

Again "Typhoid Mary" fled, again she was caught, again she was sent to North Brother Island to prevent her doing further damage.

With the memory of the disastrous results that followed Mrs. Case's luncheon fresh in mind, Cleveland's smart set has temporarily suspended all its social activities. People are reluctant to accept invitations or give them when this involves the almost certain risk of coming in contact with the "poison guest" and contracting the disease that killed Mrs. Richardson and Bonnie Roberts. Balls, receptions and parties of every kind will be abandoned at least until there is time to vaccinate every man, woman and child against typhoid.

Vaccination with certain serums which science has devised is the best protection known against the menace of disease carriers like "Typhoid Mary" and the "poison guest" as well as against other ways of contracting typhoid or paratyphoid. The use of these serums in the army and navy during the recent world war practically wiped out the diseases which formerly took such heavy toll of soldiers and sailors.

But even vaccination will not completely reassure nervous Clevelanders. The fears that have haunted them ever since Mrs. Case and thirty-eight other women began falling ill and dying can be put completely at rest only by discovering the identity of the "poison guest" who doubtless even now is rubbing shoulders with them.

Who can find this living menace? Who can point out the "poison guest" who gave to Mrs. Case's merry luncheon party its ghastly aftermath? The detective skillful enough to solve this difficult problem will be sure not only of a princely fee but of the eternal gratitude of Cleveland's wealthiest, most fashionable circles.